

*Nature stories for young readers*

## **JUST A GOOD DEED**





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# **JUST A GOOD DEED**

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**Online**

A PARTNERSHIP FOR TEACHERS, CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

*The story is based on observations made in Sanjay Van, part of South Delhi's Ridge forest, in July 2010 and at an institutional campus in South Delhi during the months of April - May 2017.*

*Photographs in this book may not show the actual size of birds or their nests.*



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**“Do something. Quick! Do something,” urged Tailorbird.**

**All I could do was stare at her stupidly.**

**“QUICK. The gardener will be here soon to water the plants,” urged Tailorbird again. Perched on a Bakul tree, she was obviously agitated. And so was I.**





I was trembling mildly. What could I do? I looked around helplessly.

**“QUICK! QUICK!”** She screamed at me.

In a big circular bed of Spider Lilies a Mulberry sapling had somehow taken root. Two of its leaves had been stitched together. Between them was a cup of soft fibre and cotton. Unfortunately, one of the leaves had given way and the other could not support the nest. Down, it had fallen but luckily for the chicks, the nest was still intact.



**In it were four chicks! And Tailorbird wanted me to do something for them.**

**What if I do something and the chicks get hurt? I was worried.**

**“No time to waste. Hurry!” yelled Tailorbird.**

**I picked up the nest carefully but with trembling hands. Should I take it home? And do what? What will I feed the chicks with?**





I turned to find Tailorbird staring at me anxiously.

"Tie it up," she ordered.

"With what?" I could not think. I was afraid of spoiling the nest further.

Tailorbird got annoyed. "With ANYTHING, anything, anything!"

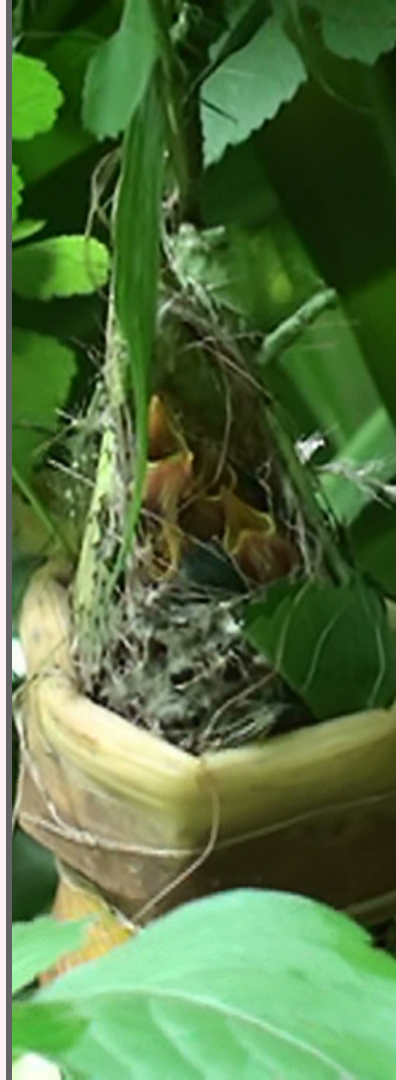
Transferring the nest to my left hand, I pulled at some



grass and tied the stalk of the remaining leaf to the sapling. I knew it would not hold. I yanked at a drying Spider Lily leaf and wound it quickly round the nest. But would it stay? I was not sure.

I ran home and quickly returned with some thread. I was happy to see the nest still in position. Heaving a great sigh of relief, I secured the nest further with lots and lots of thread.

The job was done but I could not relax.





I waited and waited more. No sign of Tailorbird at all. I sat there, chewing my nails. Anxiously, I inched closer to the nest. To take a better look at the chicks. In my clumsiness, I shook the sapling and all the chicks immediately opened their gapes wide. Expecting food. How hungry they were!

Any slightest of nest shake and chicks would open their mouths wide. I watched with amazement their lovely bright orangish yellow gapes. And what was the nice pattern inside? Like a small dark petal? I wondered.

**I quickly stepped back, not wanting to disturb or upset the chicks.**

**I looked around once again for Tailorbird and luckily spotted her near the gate a little distance away. Thankfully with a beakful of food. Happily, I waited for her to come over.**

**SURPRISE!**

**Instead, she flew in the opposite direction and directly**





down. And there, there was another chick, quite shaggy, clinging to a thin stem.

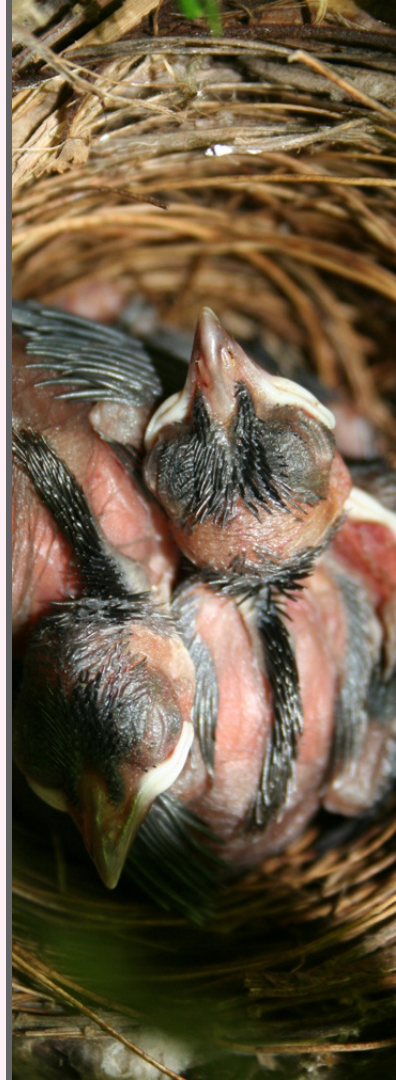
**Tailorbird fed THAT chick!**

Feeding finished, she flew away not even bothering to look at me or the nest. I called out in alarm. "These chicks are hungry too!"

"All because of you," scolded Tailorbird, from where ever she was.

I wondered what that meant. How could I be responsible for chicks being hungry? Ignoring the scolding, I looked at the chick clinging to the stem and the chicks in the nest again and again. Was this not the Tailorbird's nest then?

I had seen freshly hatched Red-Whiskered Bulbul's featherless chicks. Within a couple of days, tiny feathers grew on their head, body and wings. Of course they looked like stiff smooth shiny sticks or pins, more or less like short thin quills. Arranged in rows. Longer and longer the pins grew and in about a week's time, they started







opening up. At the tip first. Looking like baby feathers. Soft and fluffy.

Bulbul's black pin feathers had unfurled into brown baby feathers. But the black pin feathers of the chicks in the broken nest had not opened up yet. The chick Tailorbird fed had soft feathers already covering it. Now I was not sure. Who were these four chicks then?

Without me noticing, Tailorbird had returned and had perched on the Bougainvillea plant close by. "Every bird that stitches leaves is not a Tailorbird," she said abruptly.



**“Yes ... but what chicks are they? I asked.**

**“You will see for yourself,” she said. “Step back. You are too close to the nest. If you are so close, parents will not come near the nest or feed them.”**

**I did just that. Walked back and leaned against a Siris tree from where I could see the nest clearly. Soon enough flew in a small ashy black bird with a longish tail.**

**“ASHY PRINIA!” I exclaimed. The bird landed on a young Amaltas tree, made a series of quick jumps down to the**





nest, paused just for a second, fed a chick and flew away as quickly as he came.

"That explains it all!" I again exclaimed in great excitement.

"Oh ... yes ... of course. You are right. Explains who the chicks are!" Agreed Tailorbird.

"No ... No ..., not just that. I know why the nest gave way!" I declared, confidently.

**“Really! Why?” Asked Tailorbird a bit puzzled.**

**I had no choice but to make a long explanation and Tailorbird listened patiently.**

**We have a lot of plants in our backyard. Many of them are climbers. A pair of Ashy Prinias somehow liked our place and one of them would roost there every night.**

**Come April, they decided to nest in our backyard! They took about a week to decide where they wanted to make**





their nest. Every day, they would look up all possible places and leaves! Dangling from leaves, pulling them together, folding them, poking holes in them, discussing a lot and perhaps quarreling too.

After a week of serious searching, they seemed to approve a couple of Ridge Gourd leaves. Work began in right earnest.

Two leaves were brought together and fastened with some cotton and perhaps spider silk. But all the hard work got

undone that very day. The bird reworked on the same leaf for the next three days with some success. But on the fourth, a change of plan!

They started favouring Zucchini leaves! Again a lot of conversation and perhaps some more arguments. But sadly, they could not decide at all. Zucchini leaves or Ridge Gourd leaves?

They remained undecided for another week. Every day they would appear in the morning, look up both plants,





**pull, poke and fold leaves, discuss and ... leave. In the process the leaves got all holed up!**

**They seemed to finally make up their mind by mid May, a complete month after they got down to nest building. They decided on the Ridge Gourd climber. No more doubts and no more delay.**

**All the stitching together was done quickly and a nice cylinder was formed. One leaf folded into a cylinder and the cylinder fixed to another leaf. The folded leaf got**



packed with soft fibre, cotton and such things.

“Now tell me, what sort of a leaf will take that much poking and pulling? And that too for so long?” I asked.

“Oh! Two nests ... two nests and you are all ready to conclude that Ashy Prinia nests never ever last!” Tailorbird asked with some irritation.

The bird's reasoning ruffled me a bit. True, I had seen just two nests, both equally bad, one had given way but the





other had not, though it looked as though it would. But Ashy Prinia is a very common bird and I have seen so many of them in our neighbourhood.

Feeling stupid all over again, I watched Mother and Father Ashy Prinia, one after the other, frantically feeding the chicks. As though they wanted to make up for the long gap.

Caterpillars, grasshoppers, butterflies and all, without the least bit of delay or error were thrust precisely into those

bright gapes. And the chicks gratefully swallowed them. Strangely, the parents didn't seem to notice that their nest was repaired.

"Look at that!" I exclaimed. "Not a word of thanks!"

Tailorbird looked at me intently. "You know you helped. You know you did a good deed. Why then do you need words?" She asked as a matter of fact.

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Birds and action: Ashy Prinia ...



Conference on the Ridge Gourd climber ...



An exploration ...





The first attempt ...



Some more progress and hole making ...



Conference on the Zucchini plant ...



Leaf folding and the holed leaf



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